

Preliminary DRAFT Supplemental Management Document: Catch, Treat, Release (CTR) Alternative



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Background

In 1971 Congress passed the Wild Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act. The Act, as amended, gives the Secretary of Interior authority to manage wild horses and burros on public land through the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and in conjunction with the United States Department of Agriculture on Forest Service (USFS) managed public lands.

The Act required the Secretary to manage wild horses and burros on public land. The Secretary was given authority to establish wild horse and burro ranges (as defined in public law 92-195 , as amended). These ranges would be managed to protect wild horses and burros as integral to the western landscape.

BLM established the “adopt a horse” program in 1976 to place wild horses and burros removed from the range. After the claiming period ended it was asserted that populations of wild horses and burros had recovered and began to require the removal of individual animals.

Currently the BLM wild horse and burro program faces multiple obstacles from budgetary limitations and changing public land policies. This has lead to removals out pacing adoption demand. At present approximately 50,000 wild horses and burros are in holding facilities. The vast majority of these animals expected to remain in holding facilities at an estimated cost of \$50,000. per animal over it’s lifetime.

In June of 2013 the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) released a 400 page assessment of the program. The recommendations in the document are currently under review. Among the multiple observations noted in the NAS report are significant notations that include the need for expanded use of birth control methods. The report cites that the broad scale removals utilized in current practices likely increase birth rate on the range and compound challenges faced with appropriate management.



As review of current practices is underway we must begin to take “common sense” approaches as new methods for management become available. Utilizing the current tools available to begin to address multiple issues is an imperative. The Catch, Treat and Release (CTR) is an option that fits within options currently available, yet under utilized, to begin to address current obstacles faced by the program.

Dean Heller, United States Senator NV, in response to inquiry made by Jeanne Nations Northeastern RAC member states, “overpopulation can lead to severe harm to both the health of the rangeland and the wildlife found there. The National wild horse and burro center facility, located about 20 miles north of Reno in Palomino Valley Nevada, is currently operating near fill capacity. That said, I recognize that there are alternatives to wild horse and burro gathers, such as fertility control. In conversations with the BLM, I have urged them to look at all of these potential cost effective solutions when determining the most effective and humane way to manage Nevada’s wild horses and burros.”

Multiple issues currently exist in range management. Multiple symptomatic issues have developed. Procrastination in addressing core problems on the range have compounded the situation and often appear as “the problem.” As an example the number of wild horses and burros in holding is not the problem, it is a symptom of a range management strategy that has failed to be effective in actual “management.”

Appropriate Management Levels (AML) that have been based more on historic guesswork, and not hard data (as noted by the NAS), must also be addressed. An appropriate equation that takes into account actual forage use that has been appropriately allotted to a genetically sound population, would then be “AML.”



Tools are available to begin to address some of the symptomatic issues on the range that are not being appropriately implemented. CTR is one of the available tools that requires no changes in law or policy that is at our disposal. CTR offers an opportunity to not only slow population growth on the range in a temporary strategy, but offers the ability to collect badly needed data on existing herds and begin to develop a working relationship with stakeholders and advocate organizations.

Criteria and Implementation

CTR can be accomplished through a variety of options. Bait or Water trapping, field darting and helicopter assisted methods have all been used successfully to accomplish this objective. Utilizing a “trap site” adoption, when feasible, can offset costs associated with obtaining and administering accepted available birth control drugs.

Criteria can be established that assesses scope, budget and terrain to determine the appropriate method for implementation. Small areas can be addressed through field darting and bait/water trapping. Larger areas can be addressed through the use of helicopter assisted administration.

The currently available approved drug is PZP-22. This drug, when administered on a broad scale, has proven successful at slowing the rate of conception in multiple instances on the range and in private sanctuary settings. It has been used successfully at McCullough Peaks and The Return to Freedom sanctuary in Lompoc, CA. This method provides a temporary, 2-4 year, reduction in population growth. As recommendations provided within the NAS report, and further studies of Appropriate Management Levels, Herd Management Area boundaries and repatriation of Herd Areas are also likely appropriate agency action in the future, a temporary reduction in population growth strategies appears to be a responsible preliminary step toward achieving long range goals.

Trap site adoptions have proven successful in the past. At each operation, where feasible, if just four animals are adopted, costs associated with obtaining and administering PZP-22 would be offset or completely negated. If the current estimated cost of housing and caring for a wild horse are \$50,000. per animal, the associated expenses could significantly be offset or negated.

The utilization of CTR is one that has been accomplished through co-operative action with stake holders. Volunteers from the advocate community and land owners is highly



likely. Such co-operative ventures can be exemplified in many states across the west. These co-operatives could further offset any costs associated with the implementation of CTR.

At present significant gaps in data associated with inventory, water utilization, forage allocation, herd behavior and migration appear not only through a case by case situation, but within the pages of the NAS report program wide. Establishment of a permanent criteria for appropriate continued use of CTR will require accumulation of data as the program is implemented. Available limited data indicates that the effectiveness of PZP-22 varies among populations of wild horses. Further data would need to be gathered after broad scale application is achieved and incorporated into the criteria.

“Selective removal” and CTR are options that currently adhere to policy standards, There are active Records of Decisions in multiple districts in the state of Nevada, including Triple B and Silver King, that would allow a CTR operation without any further NEPA process.

While we face limited space to house any wild horses or burros removed from the range, there is no available data to indicate any reason why a broad scale use of a temporary birth control method is contraindicated.

Conclusion

With the current climate of public and Congressional scrutiny of the program, budgetary restrictions, space restrictions and a wild horse and burro population requiring management options under law, the CTR appears to be a common sense approach to addressing long standing conflicts.

CTR is an option where costs could be offset making it a practical solution to management under budgetary constraints.

Slowing population growth as further information is gained from the range and through investigation into alternate birth suppression techniques, lessens the stress on the range and to holding facilities.

CTR is a “more humane” option than placing more wild horses and burros into holding for a lifetime and will likely be well received by the public. The vast majority of wild horse and burro advocacy organizations support CTR instead of permanent capture and remove.

The CTR, with trap site adoptions, appears to be a concept that deserves sincere consideration.

Final report, including supporting documentation, available by October 15, 2014 at the Northeastern RAC. This proposal should be given serious consideration and endorsement will be made available at that time to members of the RAC.

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